Out of the Air

Ellsberg and the CIA

Colonel Fletcher Prouty, who from 1955 to 1963 was the Pentagon's liaison officer with the CIA and then directed special operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was seen twice last week on *24 Hours*. He gave his view of Daniel Ellsberg and the recent Vietnam disclosures. Did he think that there had been any editing on the CIA's behalf in these documents, which are on the whole favourable to the CIA? 'I personally believe there will be evidence of that as we go. I think that Ellsberg—who worked, if not for CIA, at least very closely with them in Saigon—may have very well known the difference between documents that should be retained and documents that should be lost—or overlooked. He worked with General Lansdale, who through most of his service was working with the CIA along with other Army specialists—it was a small group orientated very closely with the CIA. If he worked in that group and was not in the Agency I would be very surprised.' Another idea of Colonel Prouty's—which he put forward on his first appearance—was that the disclosures would be a 'tremendous boost for President Nixon'. 'I recall in January, during his news conference, he stated that he had inherited a nightmare. I recall only a month or so back that he stated it was time now to turn from international concerns to the domestic situation. And being strictly oriented to politics, it seemed that perhaps this was another step that is going to be of tremendous importance to Nixon. Whether Ellsberg had this in his mind, or whether any doors were opened to him in this process, that will be something we'll all have to know a little more about. I certainly don't know.'

Colonel Prouty also discussed the stormy relationship between President Kennedy and the CIA. 'There was a very, very strong feeling between Kennedy (and perhaps Bobby Kennedy) and the CIA. I think the CIA had helped him a lot in his election—remember Alan Dulles and J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI were the only two Eisenhower people carried over into the Kennedy Administration. I think he reacted strongly to the defeat at the Bay of Pigs, and moved against the CIA to control them.' Did he think President Kennedy's death could be related to this? 'I have heard many people mention that, and it is a possibility. I am not satisfied that the present explanation is right. I don't think Oswald himself killed President Kennedy.'